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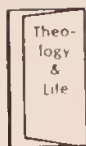
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marxist – leninist 'scientific atheism'

and the study of religion and atheism in the ussr

— james thrower —

This study presents the first attempt from within the discipline of religious studies to articulate and assess the Soviet contribution to that discipline. It examines the Soviet claim that the Marxist-Leninist approach to the study of religion is the only valid one, in that it constitutes the true "science of religion."

From an examination of the theory as it is found in the classics of Marxism-Leninism the author moves on to delineate the main outlines of Soviet studies of religion and atheism from the Revolution of 1917 to the present day. Here again Thrower breaks new ground, as no serious study has yet been made of what Soviet Marxism-Leninism today refers to as "scientific atheism"—that aspect of the Marxist-Leninist world-view which deals explicitly with religion and atheism.

Bibliographical surveys relating to the Soviet studies of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are included as appendices to this volume.

Since Soviet work in religious studies has, for the past sixty years, been carried out in virtual isolation from Western scholarship, and Russian sources have hitherto been largely inaccessible to Western scholars, this book, which presents the author's own translations of those original Soviet sources which Soviet scholars themselves regard as being most important, will be invaluable to the serious historian of religion.

(Religion and Reason 25)

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Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom

By Orlando E. Costas

Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis, 1982. 238 pp. \$12.95.

This collection of new and old essays by the Thornley B. Wood Professor of Missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia has all the characteristic fire and conviction of his earlier *The Church and Its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World* (1974). It dodges none of the major issues that have sparked debate on missions since the end of World War II. Costas is never afraid of the clash of opinions.

He lives, he says, in two divergent cultures, the North American to which his family emigrated from Puerto Rico, and the Hispanic in which he was born and to which he has now in his heart returned. Theologically as well, he moves between two worlds. He is at home both with the evangelical orthodoxy of his biblical faith, and in the wider circles of ecumenical dialogue—but not so much at home that he stands dead center in either. He seems to prefer the tensions of both, and writes, as he admits, always “from the outside.” Out of this mixture comes a yeasty blend of challenge and assent.

The book is divided into two parts. The first looks at mission from the underside of oppression, as a Latin American sees it. The second is from the perspective of the marginalized Hispanic minority in North America.

Four of the six chapters in the first part have been translated from the original Spanish. The subjects range from a discussion of the incarnation as the theological base for contextualization in mission (chap. 1), and a look at the church growth movement (chap. 3), to an appeal for “third world mission” to the United States (chap. 5), or, better yet, for united mission *to both Americas from both Americas* (chap. 6).

“Christ today is a black South African, a Latin American peasant, a Cambodian refugee,” he writes to dramatize his insistence that Christian mission today must begin with contextualizing after the pattern of the incarnate Christ who emptied himself and bore affliction as “the suffering servant,” identified with the poor and the oppressed. But incarnation without the resurrection is only half a mission, he quickly adds, recovering his theological balance. For “the true identity of Jesus Christ is not determined by our cultural identity,” much less by Marxist ideology, but “by the New Testament.” How else, he asks, can the oppressed be sure that their Christ is not as much a distortion as the oppressors’ Christ which they reject?

That blend of appreciation and reserve is typical of the essays. It is the way he analyzes the church growth school of missions. Is church growth really the test of mission? Well, yes and no. As an indispensable,

penultimate tool, yes. But as the ultimate test, no. For growth itself needs testing, he says, and forthwith suggests four helpful ways to distinguish a church that is growing, from one that (to quote Ortiz) is “simply getting fat.”

No book on mission from the Hispanic perspective would be complete without serious attention to liberation theology. Costas devotes an important short essay (chap. 8) to “The Prophetic Significance of Third World Liberation Theologies.” Not limited to one chapter, the liberation theme runs through the book as pervasively as the counter-motif of evangelical fervor through which Costas filters it. The one always challenges the other in his thinking.

The whole church, he asserts, is deeply in debt to the liberation theologians, and he is proud of their Latin American base. They have rightly challenged orthodoxy to recognize the authenticating demands of orthopraxis; “faith without works is dead.” They have shaken theology out of passive thought into transforming, vitalizing action. They have prodded “ethically impotent” ecclesiastical structures into a compassionate and responsible preference for the poor.

But he reminds us, in passing, that Latin America’s own missionary hero, Bartolomé de las Casas, more than three hundred years ago threw himself into much the same kind of crusade for the oppressed, and about the more modern liberation model, Costas has some criticisms to make. It has a tendency, he points out, to define orthopraxis only in ideologically political terms, usually Marxist. Its view of human nature is overly optimistic. The result is a latent universalism of grace and salvation which undercuts the biblical balance of grace and judgment. Therefore it gives the impression that human engineering of political and social structures will be enough to bring in the kingdom, given the benign but distant approval of an all-merciful God.

The book is never dull. It is an excellent introduction to the controversial side of mission issues, striving always for honesty and fairness to all viewpoints, but as is often the lot of the mediator, perhaps not quite succeeding in satisfying the disputants that he has an adequate resting place of his own. In the longer footnotes where he attempts to answer his critics at some theological length, he is not always convincing.

And yet, despite occasional repetitions and minor inconsistencies that are inevitable in a collection of essays written over a considerable length of time, and despite what seems to at least one reader from Asia to be an overstatement of North America’s imperial faults and an understatement of South American responsibilities for some of its own predicaments, this is one of the best books available for an understanding of current attitudes in mission studies. His critical comparison of two recent conferences on mission, ecumenical Melbourne and evangelical Pattaya, for example, and the thirty-two pages of selected bibliography at the end of the book, are of real worth. The book is to be recommended to everyone interested in the present state of the world Christian mission.

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Costas summarizes his message, at one point, with these quotable words: "Salvation lies outside the gates of the cultural, ideological, political and socioeconomic walls that surround our religious compound and shape the structures of Christendom. It is not a ticket to a privileged spot in God's universe but, rather, freedom for service. This is why Jesus said: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'"

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The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in the Nuclear Age

By Jim Castelli

Garden City, Doubleday, 1983. 283 pp. \$7.95.

The author is a journalist who was allowed unprecedented access to the files of the committee who wrote the 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response." Castelli's skill is evident in his lively account which begins in 1980 when Bishop Frank Murphy of Baltimore asked the American bishops to consider formulating a concise summary of Catholic teaching on war and peace, against the backdrop of the contemporary nuclear threat. The book is replete with anecdotes, personality clashes, ecclesiastical trivia, a sense of urgency, a sense of hope, and the conviction that the American Catholic bishops have the credibility to teach elementary and advanced peace making. Since the book contains the text of the pastoral letter as well as Castelli's backstage account, it is a valuable one-volume study of ethical reflection, personalities, and the process which inevitably accompanies a particular historical explication of moral doctrinal teaching.

The volume is easy to read and moves quickly. Occasionally, readers may find Castelli's account presuming too much on their memory. Scores of particular individuals are introduced in the narrative, but the second time a person is mentioned the naming is done without biographical reference. The reader is left to identify second-string players without a score card (or index).

One gets the feeling that Castelli is balanced and thorough in presenting the events (political, journalistic, and ecclesiastical), interventions, and debates which affected the final document. But since only Castelli read the files and interviewed participants, one cannot be certain about how comprehensive a job he has done. Moral teaching in the Catholic Church has generated a good deal of interest, especially during the past thirty years. Such matters as Catholic ethical conclu-